

On the summit of each little knoll was a heap of stones, which, in the dark, we should inevitably have mistaken for men, and probably have wasted a lot of ammunition on them, as the guide was careful to tell me that if I did not shoot any man I saw sharp, he (the brigand, not the guide) would shoot me. We halted at 6.30, near a small water-hole in the valley.

We started again soon after four in the afternoon, and an hour later reached the dry bed of a river flowing south, one hundred feet below the camp, and the lowest point I have yet reached in the Gobi (probably two thousand eight hundred feet). Here there was one very large cairn of stones and a lot of smaller ones, marking the place where a large caravan carrying silver was attacked five years ago, nine men being killed, the silver carried off, and the remainder of the men left to continue their way as best they could on foot across this awful desert.

For three miles further we passed through low hills. At every hundred yards or so was a small pile of stones, to which our two Mongols used regularly to add one or two. At the point where the hills ended were two large cairns, one on each side of the road. To these the Mongols added more stones, carefully building them up, and giving a sigh of relief as we left the hills and entered an open plain again.

At dusk we approached a hollow, in which was some water. The guide fearing that brigands might be encamped near this, we repeated the stage-conspirator performance, advancing noiselessly with revolvers in hand. Nobody appeared, however, and when we got on the open plain again, we resumed our former peaceful demeanour. It was a very disagreeable march, very dark, sultry, and oppressive, and we got along very slowly, as Mongols and camels were both very tired.

We camped at midnight, with no water within twelve miles. I opened the second bottle of sherry which I had brought from Peking, and which I had reserved for the worst part of